

Wildfire Safety Tips

The threat of wildland fires for people living near wildland areas or using recreational facilities in wilderness areas is real. Dry conditions at various times of the year and in various parts of Washington greatly increase the potential for wildland fires. There are several safety precautions that you can take to reduce the risk of fire losses and to protect you and your family.

BEFORE THE WILDFIRE

If you see a wildfire, call 9-1-1. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions asked by the dispatcher.

Find Out What Your Fire Risk Is

Learn about the history of wildfire in your area. Be aware of recent weather. A long period without rain increases the risk of wildfire. Consider having a professional inspect your property and offer recommendations for reducing the wildfire risk. Determine your community's ability to respond to wildfire. Are roads leading to your property clearly marked? Are the roads wide enough to allow firefighting equipment to get through? Is your house number visible from the roadside?



Create Safety Zones Around Your Home

All vegetation is fuel for a wildfire, though some trees and shrubs are more flammable than others. To reduce the risk, you will need to modify or eliminate brush, trees and other vegetation near your home. The greater the distance is between your home and the vegetation, the greater the protection.

Create a 30-foot safety zone around the house.

Keep the volume of vegetation in this zone to a minimum. If you live on a hill, extend the zone on the downhill side as fire spreads rapidly uphill. You should also do the following:

- Remove vines from the walls of the house.
- Move shrubs and other landscaping away from the sides of the house.
- Prune branches and shrubs within 15 feet of chimneys and stove pipes.
- Remove tree limbs within 15 feet of the ground.
- Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns.
- Replace highly flammable vegetation such as pine, eucalyptus, junipers and fir trees with lower growing, less flammable species. Check with your local fire department or garden store for suggestions.
- Replace vegetation that has living or dead branches from the ground-level up (these act as ladder fuels for the approaching fire).
- Cut the lawn often keeping the grass at a maximum of 2 inches. Watch grass and other vegetation near the driveway, a source of ignition from automobile exhaust systems.
- Clear the area of leaves, brush, evergreen cones, dead limbs and fallen trees.

Clear all combustibles within 30 feet of any structure.

- Install electrical lines underground, if possible.
- Ask the power company to clear branches from power lines.
- Stack firewood 100 feet away and uphill from any structure.

- Store combustible or flammable materials in approved safety containers and keep them away from the house.
- Keep the gas grill and propane tank at least 15 feet from any structure. Clear an area 15 feet around the grill. Always use the grill cautiously but refrain from using it all during high risk times.

Before the Fire Approaches Your House

- Evacuate. Evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to preparing the home. Anyone with medical or physical limitations and the young and the elderly should be evacuated immediately.
- Wear Protective Clothing.
- Remove Combustibles. Clear items that will burn from around the house, including wood piles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them outside of your defensible space.
- Close/Protect Openings. Close outside attic, eaves and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- Close Inside Doors/Open Damper. Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen.
- Shut Off Gas. Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- Water. Connect garden hoses. Fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water.
- Ladder. Place a ladder against the house in clear view.
- Car. Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- Valuables. Place valuable papers, mementos and anything "you can't live without" inside the car in the garage, ready for quick departure.
- Pets. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

If You Are Caught in a Wildfire

Survival in a Vehicle

- This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.
- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes.
- Stay in the car. Do not run! Your engine may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car. Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperatures inside will increase. Metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

If You Are Trapped at Home

- Stay calm. As the fire front approaches, go inside the house. You can survive inside. The fire will pass before your house burns down.

If Caught in the Open

- The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. On a steep mountainside, the back side is safer. Avoid canyons, natural "chimneys" and saddles.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat.
- If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until after the fire passes!

WHAT TO DO AFTER A WILDFIRE

- Check the roof immediately. Put out any roof fires, sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.
- The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch." Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.